

~~ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A 18~~WASHINGTON POST
6 June 1986

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Intelligence Oversight: The Way It Should Be

In a May 19 Post article concerning congressional oversight of intelligence, Sen. Dave Durenberger stated: "Henry Hyde doesn't want oversight. . . . Henry Hyde wants a situation in which a few buddies in the community are informed and that takes care of Congress and the public."

Those comments reflect a serious misunderstanding of my bill, H.J. Res. 7, creating a joint committee on intelligence, which now has 158 bipartisan cosponsors. It enjoys such widespread support because it is viewed correctly as strengthening responsible congressional oversight. It is also seen as the best means available for repairing the serious deterioration in relations between Congress and the intelligence community with the resultant loss of trust—the most vital ingredient in the oversight process.

The senator apparently believes that the oversight and analytical capabilities of congressmen sitting together as a joint committee would somehow evaporate. Quite frankly, I don't follow this logic. The notion of a joint committee is comparable to an ongoing House/Senate conference committee. Anyone who has observed a conference committee knows that the often intense "competitive analysis" of the issues between conferees is one of its most useful features.

H.J. Res. 7 requires the bipartisan membership of the joint committee to be drawn from the four committees in each House that historically have exercised some oversight over intelligence activities—Foreign Affairs, Foreign Relations, Appropriations, Armed Services and Judiciary.

That's a far cry from "a few buddies" being informed, as Sen. Durenberger claims.

The senator recently noted in a Hale

Institute pamphlet "that the budget review process currently carried on by both House and Senate intelligence committees is crucial for effective congressional oversight. A joint committee without such authority would have little if any real influence over the conduct of intelligence activities." That's a valid point. Consequently, H.J. Res. 7 stipulates that the joint committee shall have exclusive legislative jurisdiction with respect to any intelligence activity conducted by any agency or department of the federal government.

A joint oversight panel with equitable party membership, supported by a small, professional staff, would diminish the possibilities for partisan posturing and significantly reduce the number of individuals with regular access to sensitive information. This would not only minimize the risk of damaging unauthorized disclosures, but it would also substantially increase the likelihood that the FBI and the Justice Department would identify sources of leaks.

A joint committee would also eliminate the possibility of intelligence agencies playing one committee against the other. Furthermore, it would greatly simplify the problem of handling the classified data that the two intelligence committees and others now regularly receive.

Congress has increasingly insisted upon being briefed and consulted by the executive branch on national security and foreign policy questions. This is particularly true during fast-breaking crisis situations. A consolidated panel would provide one point of congressional contact in such instances.

A bipartisan Senate Select Committee (headed by Sen. Dan Quayle) studied how to streamline the Senate's committee system. The Quayle panel endorsed the joint committee concept in its final

report to the Senate in December 1984, as did then-Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker and Sen. Sam Nunn. Ex-CIA directors Richard Helms, James Schlesinger, George Bush and Stansfield Turner also have voiced their support, as has the Vice President's Task Force on Combating Terrorism.

Finally, this joint committee proposal is an important aspect of a broad-based, nonpartisan effort to tighten and improve this nation's intelligence infrastructure at a time when all of us are much more conscious of security problems because of recent spy scandals, terrorism and egregious leaks that have severely hurt the United States.

HENRY J. HYDE
U.S. Representative (R-Ill.)
Washington